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In his moment of anxiety, doubt, and fear, the Lord invites Martin Harris to repent, to remember his sufferings, and then to both learn of and walk with him—a powerful reminder for all who are caught in a moment of staggering confidence when trying to obey a difficult commandment.

Accomplishing the Will of the Father: A Historical and Theological Examination of Doctrine and Covenants 19

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The year 1830 was an exciting time in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Five thousand copies of the Book of Mormon had just rolled off of the press in March, the first conference was held in April wherein the Church was officially organized, and the early members were thrilled that the Lord was again speaking to them through a chosen seer. The Doctrine and Covenants captures the revelations being poured out and the excitement, as well as the challenges, of early Church leaders. One of the early Saints who was immersed in these events, particularly the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, was Martin Harris.

Having mortgaged his property to pay the significant cost of printing the Book of Mormon, Harris became anxious about how he was going to recoup this money. Knowing this, and surely in an effort to demonstrate good faith and gratitude for his incredible sacrifice, Joseph Smith signed an agreement which would give Harris “equal privilege”¹ to sell copies of the Book of Mormon. The agreement was signed in January 1830, and Harris went to work as soon as copies were available in late March. However, things did not go very well for him.

Joseph Smith had been traveling with Joseph Knight to Manchester, New York, when they saw Harris walking across the street carrying numerous copies of the Book of Mormon. Knight recorded that Harris, looking distraught, cried out to the prophet, “The books will not sell for no body wants them!” He then petitioned, “I want a commandment (a revelation).”² A desperate, yet trusting Martin Harris was seeking further direction from the Lord through his anointed mouthpiece.

From 1835 until 2013, this was the narrative which shaped the contextual understanding of Doctrine and Covenants 19. It had long been presented that the revelation came in direct response to Harris’s pleading. The challenge is, it probably isn’t accurate. To be clear, the story is true. The plight of Martin Harris desperately trying to sell copies of the Book of Mormon to recoup his money is true. The exchange with Joseph Smith is even accurate. But historians working at the Joseph Smith Papers Project determined that Doctrine and Covenants 19 was most likely received in the summer of 1829. Rather than a response to Harris’s frustrations after the book was published, the revelation was now placed in the context of urging Harris to follow through on his commitment to pay for the book’s publication.³ In fact, Joseph’s response to Martin’s request pointed back to this previous revelation, section 19, when he told Martin Harris in 1830, “Fulfill what you have got.”⁴

If the story is accurate and Joseph’s response is accurate and everything recorded in section 19 accurately captures the revelation from the Lord, one might ask why we are making such a big deal about a six-month difference in the dating of the revelation. Students, teachers, and leaders in the Church have long understood and appreciated the fact that context informs and enhances content. What may sometimes be overlooked, however, is the degree to which history and theology are informed and influenced by one another. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how theological insights can come from a correct understanding of historical context. Specifically, it will show how the life and challenges of Martin Harris provided an opportunity for the Lord to clarify some of his misunderstandings, as well as reveal new insights into that most eternally significant theological concept, the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Historical Context

In its introduction, the Doctrine and Covenants reminds readers, “These sacred revelations were received in answer to prayer, in times of need, and

came out of real-life situations involving real people.”⁵ To liken these revelations to our day then, we must first pay the price to understand the “real-life situations” of the “real people” who were seeking direction and guidance in their time of need. Furthermore, as we study the Doctrine and Covenants, we remember that the Church’s history and its theology are inseparably connected. Such was certainly the case with Martin Harris and the revelation found in section 19.

The summer of 1829 was pivotal in the unfolding of the Restoration. The translation of the Book of Mormon having just been completed, attention was urgently directed to the logistics of having it published. Because of previous conversations and commitments made by Martin Harris, Joseph Smith had long been assured that Harris would cover the financing.⁶ During their due diligence, Joseph and Martin talked with several printers in both Palmyra and Rochester, New York. The most convenient press, and therefore the most logical business partner, was local printer E. B. Grandin. However, Grandin was, to put it mildly, skeptical of the project. Indeed, as late as 26 June 1829, he published an article in which he pejoratively refers to “a pretended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration.” The article would go on to call the record a “Golden Bible,” explaining that “most people entertain an idea that the whole matter is the result of a gross imposition, and a grosser superstition.”⁷ Not surprisingly, Grandin had little interest in publishing the book. It was not until Joseph and Martin returned to Palmyra and presented Grandin with the terms of an offer made by Elihu F. Marshall, a competing printer in neighboring Rochester, that he reconsidered. Seeing that the book would be published regardless of his involvement, Grandin entered into negotiations.⁸

When Grandin finally agreed to print the record, he set the price at three thousand dollars for five thousand copies, an inflated cost in the early nineteenth century. It was customary in this period for printers to shoulder “the initial costs associated with printing a book,” trusting “that once a book was published its sales would generate profits for them as well as the author.”⁹ However, because of Grandin’s feelings surrounding the whole enterprise, he demanded the entire payment up front. So firm was he on this point that, according to John Gilbert (Grandin’s typesetter), he refused even to purchase the material necessary for the project before being paid in full.¹⁰

Martin Harris played an integral role in these negotiations. Furthermore, he, along with his wife Lucy, had previously volunteered to assist in funding the project as early as 1827.¹¹ Remembering his commitment, and conscious that a one-time payment of this magnitude would require him to give up essentially all of his property,¹² Harris formalized the agreement, trusting that the Lord was in this work and would be with him and his family. The deal was likely struck, at least in principle, sometime in late July or early August 1829.¹³

It is at this point in the narrative that we typically speak of Harris “mortgaging” his farm. The assumption, when using this language, seems to be that Harris would retain full ownership of the property and that the note would simply allow Grandin to assume the property if he did not recoup his investment by books sales. However, insights gained from the Joseph Smith Papers Project have demonstrated that Grandin required the actual deed for the property (thus functionally bestowing ownership rights).¹⁴ While this might be viewed by some as a technicality in semantics or interpretation, it is essential to understanding the context of this story and, by extension, the message of section 19.

While the agreement was made in late July or early August (and no later than 11 August), it was now the end of August and the publication of the Book of Mormon was still yet to begin.¹⁵ Why the delay? Was the printer, Grandin, dragging his feet because of his biases against the project? Was there a shortage of supplies in this small farming community which necessitated extra time to procure the needed paper and type? Was the delay caused by some sort of legal negotiations in order to ratify the deal? The truth is, the delay was not caused by any of these variables. Once Grandin knew that he would be compensated well and would receive payment in full on the front end, he was willing to set aside his biases and move forward with the project. There is no evidence of any shortage in supplies nor of any unnecessary legal delays. So what *was* responsible for the delay of the printing of this sacred record? The answer is quite simple and hearkens back to the introduction of the Doctrine and Covenants. This was one of those “real-life situations” involving “real people” that demonstrates the real struggles, concerns, and demands of discipleship.¹⁶

Professors Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat, both of whom worked extensively on the *Joseph Smith Papers* volume detailing these events, summarized the situation in this way:

By August, Martin Harris must have realized that the \$3,000 price tag to print the Book of Mormon would require him to give up most of his assets. Though he had been a part of the translation process, writing the words Joseph spoke as he read them from the seer stones and even being shown the gold plates by an angel of God, when faced with the realities of losing his wealth, Harris's will faltered. Perhaps the condescending words from men like Thurlow Weed and Charles Anthon echoed in his ears. Each had assured him that the enterprise was doomed to failure.¹⁷

The historical significance of this moment cannot be overstated. Indeed, the successful publication of the Book of Mormon hinged on how Harris would respond to these doubts and hesitations. Grandin's brother-in-law captured the implications well when he said, "Harris became for a time in some degree staggered in his confidence; but nothing could be done in the way of printing without his aid."¹⁸ Nothing could be done. It was that simple. Acknowledging that the Book of Mormon is the "keystone of our religion," is it too much of a stretch to suggest that this moment was pivotal not just to the publishing of the record but also to the overall success of the Restoration?

Section 19

The revelation found in section 19 is to be situated against this backdrop. The truths taught in this revelation illustrate that history and theology often have a symbiotic relationship when it comes to the restoration of the gospel. To this point, it is significant that the Prophet Joseph introduces this revelation as "a commandment of God and not of man, to *Martin Harris*, given by him who is Eternal." Another way of reading this introduction is that an omniscient Lord who, by definition, knows the end from the beginning, is aware of Harris's situation. He knows of his anxiety, his hesitations, and the significant sacrifices he is being asked to make. Consequently, while the rest of us can certainly learn from and liken the verses in section 19 unto ourselves, in its fundamental and exegetical context, it is a revelation from an empathetic and immortal God speaking to one very anxious mortal man.

Consider how the revelation begins: "I am Alpha and Omega, Christ the Lord; yea, even I am he, the beginning and the end, the Redeemer of the world" (verse 1). From the outset the Lord establishes his identity, his eternal nature, and his role in the plan as the anointed Redeemer. From Alpha to Omega, the beginning to the end, his work is to save and to redeem. Of course, as a religious man, Harris already knew and believed all of this. In his search for truth he had "reportedly investigated Quakers, Universalists,

Restorationists, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians.”¹⁹ Commenting on the development of Harris’s religious views, the late Ronald W. Walker wrote:

At the age of thirty-five, he found himself deeply stirred by the competing claims of the religious revivalists. . . . On occasion he apparently visited Palmyra’s several churches and established with churchgoers a mutual rapport. “All of the Sects called me brother because the Lord [had] enlightened me,” he recollected. As a youth he may have worshipped with the Friends (the extended Harris family had Quaker ties), but since his midlife religious awakening, though “anxiously sought” by the “sectarians,” he had felt “inspired of the Lord & taught of the Spirit” to refuse a formal commitment.²⁰

Determined in his convictions, Harris repeatedly relied on the Bible for clarity and direction. Commenting on his mastery of the biblical text, one acquaintance observed, “He could quote more scripture than any man in the neighborhood.”²¹ Indeed, Harris himself once boasted, “I defy any man to show me any passage of scripture that I am not posted on or familiar with.”²² What he lacked in humility, he made up for in purpose and trust in the Lord. These years of yearning, studying, and searching gave him a strong sense of mission. These experiences provided convincing evidence to Martin that, in his own words, God “had a work for me to do.”²³ According to one account, “he even sensed the possibility of the coming forth of a new book of scripture which would join the Bible in a latter-day work.”²⁴ In short, Harris was a seeker. His greatest desire seemed to be to find God’s will and mission for him and then boldly act accordingly.

Returning to the revelation, it seems instructive that the Lord says immediately after outlining his most fundamental role as Redeemer, “I, having accomplished and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father, concerning me” (verse 2). This language points forward to his statements later in the revelation when he says, “Glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (verse 19) and “I came by the will of the Father, and I do his will” (verse 24). Remembering that this is a revelation “to Martin Harris,” which was “received in answer to prayer, in [a time] of need, and came out of [a] real-life situation,”²⁵ could it be that the Lord was teaching Martin something about mission and about accomplishing the will of the Father? Is it possible that these introductory words are not only to detail the Lord’s redeeming mission but also to speak to Martin about his own unique mission? One of the questions at hand in section 19 seems to be whether or not *Martin* would be willing to drink his own bitter cup and whether or not *he* will partake and finish *his* preparations unto the children of

men (verses 18–19). Indeed, the Lord *did* have a work for Martin to do, as he had previously felt. And it seems that in this moment, when “Harris became for a time in some degree staggered in his confidence,”²⁶ the Lord wanted to remind him of this work, his mission, and the will of the Father concerning *him* (verse 2).

Martin Harris’s Work

In the revelation the Lord makes Harris’s mission clear: “I command thee that thou shalt not covet thine own property, but impart it freely to the printing of the Book of Mormon, which contains the truth and the word of God” (verse 26). Harris is then commanded to “publish it [the Book of Mormon] upon the mountains, and upon every high place, and among every people that thou shalt be permitted to see. And thou shalt do it with all humility, trusting in me” (verses 29–30). Interestingly, Harris was not only to pay for the publishing of the Book of Mormon but was to also publish it throughout the world, preaching “repentance and faith on the Savior” (verse 31). “Behold, this is a great and last commandment,” the Lord continues, “which I shall give unto you concerning this matter; for this shall suffice for thy daily walk, even unto the end of thy life” (verse 32). Note the purpose-filled language used by the Lord in that last phrase: “this shall suffice for thy daily walk, *even unto the end of thy life* (emphasis added). The Lord continues, “Impart a portion of thy property, yea, even part of thy lands. . . . Pay the debt thou hast contracted with the printer. Release thyself from bondage” (verses 34–35).

As mentioned, in his search for truth, Harris had explored many religious traditions. Although each of these traditions likely influenced his personal beliefs, some scholars have pointed to the particular influence of Universalism.²⁷ At the core of the Universalist theology was a confidence that because of God’s saving power, all his children would eventually be saved. Although it is difficult to ascertain precisely where Harris’s views were in 1829 regarding the scope of the Lord’s redemption, one possible reading of section 19 could be approached with the assumption that he has held on to some of these Universalist beliefs. The Book of Mormon teaches that “the Lord giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3). Consider how Doctrine and Covenants 19:3–4 could be read as a message the Lord was giving Harris in light of a possible Universalist perspective. In this passage the Lord speaks of “the last great day of judgment” when he will judge “every man according

to his works and the deeds which he hath done” (verse 3). Underscoring the concepts of judgment, justice, and accountability, the Lord then adds, “And surely every man must repent or suffer” (verse 4).

Repent or suffer. Every man is judged according to his works and deeds. So what does this have to do with Martin Harris and the timing of the revelation? It may be demonstrating that the Lord is telling Martin, in his own language and understanding, that he expects him to keep the promise he made. Martin had previously learned this lesson in a painful, personal way when he lost the 116 pages (see sections 3, 10). Perhaps in this vulnerable moment, when his commitment to his promise seemed to be wavering again, the Lord was reminding Martin of the consequences when he “set at naught the counsels of God,” broke “the most sacred promises which were made before God,” depended upon his “own judgment,” and “boasted in his own wisdom” (Doctrine and Covenants 3:13). Indeed, the Lord himself seems to connect these events when he said, “I command you to repent, . . . lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, *of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit*” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:20; emphasis added).

It is clear that there are consequences for breaking covenants and punishments for broken promises. The Lord warned that if Martin did not fulfill the mission with which he was commissioned in this revelation, “misery thou shalt receive if thou wilt slight these counsels, yea, even the destruction of thyself and property” (verse 33). Among other lessons, the Lord seems to be teaching Martin Harris a principle once summarized by Elder Bruce C. Hafen: “We can have eternal life if we want it, but only if there is *nothing else* we want more. So we must willingly give everything, because God himself can’t make us grow against our will and without our full participation.”²⁸ For Martin, that meant giving up his property. Covet not thine own property? When one considers that “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1), it becomes clear that what the Lord is really requiring of Martin is the consecration of his heart and a willingness to say, with the Lord, that he has “accomplished and finished the will of him whose I am” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:2).

Atonement Theology

With the historical context of section 19 set, we now turn our focus to its theological insights. Speaking of theology, Terryl Givens has said, “That term

can scare some people off, but all we mean by ‘theology’ is a more considered and reflective meditation on the scriptures and their implications. . . . Theology just means ‘God talk,’ ‘God discourse.’ So theology is a way of trying to be more introspective and contemplative about our faith in rigorous ways.”²⁹ Consequently, any discussion about section 19 must address theology, repentance, and the Atonement of Christ. In this section we see a unique example of “God discourse” as the Lord speaks intimately to Martin Harris and provides insight into the suffering he experienced during the atoning process.

Before exploring these passages, however, it may be helpful to first consider Atonement theology from a broader perspective in order to see the unique contributions of this section. Recognizing its eternal significance, Christians have long sought ways to understand, explore, and teach the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The scriptures themselves demonstrate an effort by many to find an adequate way to articulate Atonement theology. Mark Ellison, an associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU, recently wrote that in the standard works of the Church,

We find diverse metaphors and models of atonement. Authors variously describe Christ’s redemptive act as a payment, sacrifice, vicarious suffering, victory, means of healing, means of liberation, or means of reconciliation, to name a few. Theologians have drawn upon these metaphors or models of salvation to formulate broad theories that conceptualize atonement primarily as a kind of ransom, a satisfaction of justice, or a means of moral transformation. Surprisingly, the presence of such a diversity of views has not posed much of a problem in Christian history. On matters of the *person* of Christ, Christians have debated, held synods, called councils, hammered out creeds to define orthodox positions, and divided into factions over theological differences. But when it comes to the *work* of Christ, Christians have generally agreed that Christ saves, without conclusively defining how or enshrining any single explanation as correct.³⁰

Harris would likely have been exposed to different theories on how the Atonement worked as he investigated different Christian sects. Though he had decided in his thirties that “I might as well plunge myself into the water as to have [any] of the Sects Baptise me,”³¹ he had reportedly at some point been each of the following: an orthodox Quaker, a Universalist, a Restorationer, a Baptist, and a Presbyterian.³² Consequently, we could expect the Lord’s revelation to Harris to interact with some of the theological assumptions he held from these various denominations (again speaking to him in his own language and understanding). In the following section we will demonstrate how a few of the theological lessons revealed in section 19 interact with some

of the teachings being discussed in Harris's day. We will also show, by extension, how these teachings could also potentially be speaking to Harris's plight.

Atonement Theology in Section 19

Eternal Punishment

One of the concepts which was of great interest to both ministers and parishioners in the early nineteenth century was the idea of judgment/punishment. Indeed, Joseph himself said that from a very early age, "my mind became seriously impressed with the all-important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul."³³ For the Universalists, this topic had become divisive. Summarizing this theological dilemma, Casey Griffiths said: "A vigorous debate erupted among the Universalists concerning the punishment for sinners. Some . . . taught that souls would be saved through a mystical union with Christ, while others taught that souls would be saved after a long period of suffering for sin, and some taught that suffering for sin would be confined solely to earthly life. The division caused by this one doctrine was such that most churches could not ratify any type of unified profession of belief without filling it with numerous concessions to make all parties happy." Griffiths went on to argue that "the teachings of Universalism may have provided questions leading to many of the revelations given to the Prophet."³⁴ Recognizing Harris's previous leanings toward Universalism, it is possible that the Lord's revelation to him in section 19 is engaging with some of these issues. Consider, for example, how the following passages speak to these concerns:

And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless. . . . Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written *endless torment*. . . . Wherefore, I will explain unto you this mystery. . . . For behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore—eternal punishment is God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment. (verses 4, 6, 8, 10–12)

There are a few relevant points to highlight from these verses. First, the Restoration clearly has something to contribute theologically. Second, as we situate these revelations against the backdrop of the broader theological discussions happening in Antebellum America, we find even greater relevance and the unique doctrinal contributions become even more impressive. Third, while there are doctrinal implications for the broader Church, another way of reading these passages is to return to the emphasis of the article: This is

an intimate revelation between the Lord and Martin Harris. Approached through this lens, the Lord is telling Harris that he personally needs to “repent or suffer” (verse 4). He specifically commands Harris to “repent, and keep the commandments which [he had] received by the hand of” the Prophet Joseph (verse 13). The Lord reiterates one of his expectations by telling Harris, “Impart a portion of thy property, yea, even part of thy lands” and “Pay the debt thou hast contracted with the printer. Release thyself from bondage” (verses 34–35). While this could be referring to financial bondage, another possible reading of this phrase is as a warning against spiritual bondage, which would have eternal implications. Is the Lord saying that if Harris does not fulfill this commandment, then he will not have a place in the kingdom? It would seem that is taking it too far. However, perhaps the Lord is speaking to Harris’s Universalist assumptions in saying that even though there may be a possibility that he could still have a place in the eternities, there are considerable consequences for breaking covenants.

“*I God, Have Suffered*”

It is significant that when the Savior speaks of his suffering in section 19, he says, “*I, God, have suffered these things for all*” (verse 16; emphasis added). In this same pericope, he would say that this “suffering caused myself, *even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain*” (verse 18; emphasis added). In contrast to the low Christological understanding of the Quakers,³⁵ Jesus here identifies himself as a God. To some in Antebellum America, particularly those influenced by the beliefs of the Quakers, this would have been contrary to their theological assumptions. Consequently, when the Lord speaks of himself as God, “suffering these things for all,” it thrusts Restoration scripture into the broader discussions of Christian theology.³⁶

“*That They Might Not Suffer*”

In verse 16 the Savior said that he “suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer.” This language sounds a little like the penal substitution theory with its Old Testament roots. In penal substitution theory (adhered to by both Presbyterians and Baptists in the early nineteenth century), Christ suffered a punishment that was required (i.e., penal requirement) by God. When suffering this way, Christ was taking the place of sinners (i.e., acting as a substitute).³⁷ Penal substitution systematically connected the substitutionary sacrifices of the Old Testament with the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In

this passage Christ speaks as the true “Lamb of God” who suffers and dies in place of the sinner.

However, it is important to note that section 19 does not align with some of the implications of a penal substitution model. For example, the Calvinistic interpretation of this model led to a view of a limited atonement. Conversely, according to verse 16, Christ’s substitutionary act is not limited to a small group predestined to salvation. It is, in fact, intended for “all, that they might not suffer”—something that would ring true to an adherent to universal views of the Atonement. Thus, according to the theology of section 19, Christ may be acting as a substitute, but he is substituting himself in place of all people so that all may have hope for eternal life.

Another important area where section 19 could potentially push back against the traditional penal substitution model is regarding the cause of the suffering. As one Christian theologian cautioned, “If distorted, [penal substitution] can make ‘God’ or ‘God the Father’ seem like the villain of the story, with Christ the hero who wins our freedom.”³⁸ In alignment with this insight, the language in section 19 does not imply that it is the Father inflicting this pain on Jesus, it is sin itself.³⁹ Indeed, the Lord says that he suffered so that “they might not suffer *if they would repent*; but *if they would not repent* they must suffer even as I” (verses 16–17). Thus, anytime suffering is mentioned in this section it seems to stem from sin (Christ’s suffering for the sins of humanity and an individual suffering for being unrepentant of sin) rather than the wrath of the Father.⁴⁰ In context, the message to Martin Harris is to repent of his sins so that he does not have to suffer unnecessarily.

“To Bleed at Every Pore”

One of the most unique theological statements of this revelation is from verse 18 when Christ details the depth of his suffering, saying that it “caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit.” This passage provides a very specific description of his suffering. First, the verse describes pain so severe that the Savior—who emphasizes the he is “God, the greatest of all”—was caused to tremble, or to “shake involuntarily.”⁴¹ Second, in addition to causing involuntary shaking, the pain initiated a physical response where blood came from every pore.

The idea of the Savior bleeding from every pore is worth further exploration because it has theological implications. The phrase “bleed from every pore” gains further significance when it interacts with other Restoration scripture. These books of scripture are replete with references to the redeeming and cleansing effects of the blood of Christ.⁴² It is significant to note that the account in section 19 is corroborated in Mosiah 3:7 when an angel declared (through King Benjamin), “He shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, *blood cometh from every pore*, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (emphasis added). Furthermore, the Book of Mormon teaches that “because of their faith in the Lamb of God,” the garments of the righteous “are made white in his blood” (1 Nephi 12:10). We read that “his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them” (Mosiah 3:11). King Benjamin’s people desperately cry out to the Lord, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ” (Mosiah 4:2). The Anti-Nephi-Lehies felt that their swords were “washed bright through the blood of the Son” (Alma 24:13) and then later, when the Savior introduced the sacrament in Bountiful, he said that it was to be partaken of “in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you” (3 Nephi 18:11). One of the final promises from Moroni is that we can be “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ” (Moroni 10:33).

This theme is carried throughout the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price when the Lord references his “blood which was shed for the remission of your sins” (Doctrine and Covenants 27:2). He later provides a caution to “the wicked,” saying, “My blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:17). We read that those in the celestial kingdom are “just men made perfect through Jesus . . . , who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:69). From the Book of Moses we learn that the Lord instructed Adam to teach his children that they must be “born again . . . and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten,” because it is “by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:59–60). Finally, in his own moment of agony after seeing generations of suffering, Enoch cries out, “When shall the blood of the Righteous be shed, that all they that mourn may be sanctified and have eternal life?” (Moses 7:45).

The literality of the shedding of the blood of Christ plays a significant role in our theology. Consequently, an argument could be made that the Savior's description of his atoning sacrifice and his bleeding from every pore is one of the most important theological contributions made in the Doctrine and Covenants. In some ways, the image of Christ pleading to his Father that this cup may pass from him profoundly underscores his teaching that by "virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:4). Indeed, when the Lord gave language to his role as advocate he described "the sufferings and death of him who did no sin" and emphasized his plea to the Father that "*the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified*" (Doctrine and Covenants 45:4–5; emphasis added).

Surely the description in section 19 of Christ's suffering and the efficacy of his Atonement was a poignant and timely message for a worried and anxious Martin Harris in the fall of 1829. His overarching message to Harris is to "repent" (verses 13, 16, 20), "confess your sins" (verse 20), and then to "preach naught but repentance" (verse 21). In this way both Harris and those to whom he preaches have access to the sanctification which cometh through the salvific blood of Christ.

"Would That I Might Not Drink the Bitter Cup, and Shrink"

A final theological implication from this revelation is that the suffering Christ faced was not just physical, but spiritual in nature too—a truly bitter cup. Verse 18 reveals that the experience caused the Lord to "suffer both body and spirit." These details of his suffering are not just grisly particulars but are intended to inform Martin Harris (and future readers of this revelation) of the cost of redemption. Christ's recounting of his suffering ends as he victoriously proclaims, "Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men" (verse 19).

The previously discussed emphasis on physical suffering and blood provokes connections between atonement and Old Testament sacrifice. Verse 18 not just symbolically points to blood in the act of atonement, but instead provides an account of an atoning sacrifice of body and spirit so intense that blood becomes an inherent part of the sacrifice. However, connecting the Atonement to Old Testament sacrifice is not the only role that the description in verse 18 plays. The details in verse 18 are also intended to lead Martin Harris (and future readers) to change. This is likely why the Lord invites

Martin to repent both immediately before and after detailing his sufferings (see verses 14–16, 20).

If theology truly is “God talk” and is thus “a more considered and reflective meditation on the scriptures and their implications,”⁴³ then the Savior’s detailing of his atoning process to Martin Harris should stand paramount in our own theological pondering. This detailed account was originally written to inspire change in Martin Harris. Its purpose as a canonized text is to have the same effect upon modern readers. Each week the Savior invites members of the Church, through the sacrament, to “always remember him” (Doctrine and Covenants 20:77). Speaking to Oliver Cowdery, the Savior commands, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:36). This passage is powerful on its own but gains even greater importance when read in context with the next verse. As Oliver—and, by extension, all readers of this passage—look unto the Lord, what specifically is he hoping we will see? “Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:37). Could it be that this is also part of the Lord’s purpose in detailing his suffering to Martin Harris? Perhaps his message is, “Martin, look unto me.” “Martin, remember me. Remember my suffering.” Indeed, he *would* tell Martin, “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:23). In his moment of anxiety, doubt, and fear, the Lord invites Martin Harris to repent, to remember his sufferings, and then to both learn of and walk with him—a powerful reminder for all who are caught in a moment of staggering confidence when trying to obey a difficult commandment.

Conclusion

In Matthew 19 we read the story of the rich young ruler who approaches the Savior and asks, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” When the Savior responds that he must “keep the commandments,” the young man says, “All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?” To which the Lord replies, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast . . . and come and follow me.” We are told that the young man “went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (see Matthew 19:16–22). At first glance many readers assume that this young man is selfish, perhaps even a bit pompous. In Mark’s account

of this exchange, however, we read that this young man came “*running*” to Jesus and “*kneeled to him*, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17; emphasis added). Later in the exchange we read, “Then *Jesus beholding him loved him*, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21; emphasis added). When we consider this exchange, after seeing a glimpse of the character of this man, we sometimes hope that his story is not yet complete as he walks away sorrowful because of his great possessions. It would be a powerful addition if we were to later read that after his initial hesitation and stumbling, he came back again, perhaps even running, kneeling, and placing his riches at the feet of the Lord.

Read in its original context, Doctrine and Covenants 19 captures a moment just like this. It is as if the Lord is saying to Martin, “One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21). Like the rich young ruler, Martin stumbled for a time. He questioned. He “went away sorrowful” because of his “great possessions” (Matthew 19:22). But to his eternal credit, he came back. Unlike with the rich young ruler, we do not have to wonder how Martin’s story ended. On 25 August 1829 Martin returned to the scene and consecrated essentially all his property to the Lord.⁴⁴ Ultimately, he “accomplished and finished the will . . . of the Father” concerning him (Doctrine and Covenants 19:2). In the final verse of section 19, the Lord asks Martin, “Canst thou be humble and meek, and conduct thyself wisely before me?” (verse 41). Martin answered these questions with his actions—as articulated by President Dallin H. Oaks, “for which he should be honored for all time.”⁴⁵

One purpose of this article was to demonstrate how closely related our history is to our theology. Furthermore, our desire has been to emphasize the reality that as we spend the time to adequately grasp the historical context of scripture, it becomes easier to find relevant and meaningful application. Martin’s experience with the Lord in section 19 shows us just how intimately involved the Lord is in his work. He is not likely requiring most of us to sell all our property or give all our riches to the poor. But one of the principles underscored in Martin’s experience is that the Lord has customized expectations for each of us. One of the probing questions from this revelation is whether or not *we* will be willing to accomplish the will of

the Father concerning us. As we ponder the sufferings Christ experienced and his strength in partaking of his bitter cup, are we inspired to look to him, to repent, to remember him, and to walk with him?

A hymn of the Restoration beautifully underscores these lessons from the doctrine taught in section 19. The hymn says, “Think of me, thou ransomed one; Think what I for thee have done. With my blood that dripped like rain, Sweat in agony of pain, With my body on the tree I have ransomed even thee.” In this hymn the Lord asks us to remember him, to remember his sufferings, and ultimately to remember our ransomed condition because of him. The hymn continues, “At the throne I intercede; For thee ever do I plead. I have loved thee as thy friend, With a love that cannot end. Be obedient, I implore, Prayerful, watchful evermore, And be constant unto me, That thy Savior I may be.”⁴⁶ Similarly, the Lord’s message to Martin Harris, and by extension to anyone else struggling in a moment of confusion or discouragement, is “repent,” “come unto me,” “learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit” with the promise that “you shall have peace in me” (verses 13, 41, 23). In conclusion, we ask with the Lord, “Canst thou read this without rejoicing and lifting up thy heart for gladness?” (verse 39).

Notes

1. “Agreement with Martin Harris, 16 January 1830,” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers. The idea to look for this agreement was influenced by Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book: 2015). The authors of this article are deeply indebted to the work of MacKay and Dirkmaat for their synthesis of this narrative. The purpose of including this narrative in the article is not necessarily to introduce it for the first time, but rather to show how the shift in dating actually has significant relevance in helping readers draw application from Doctrine and Covenants 19.

2. Joseph Knight Sr. Reminiscences (no date), MS 3470, Church History Library; Historical Introduction to “Revelation, circa Summer 1829 [D&C 19],” The Joseph Smith Papers.

3. This revelation more closely fits a summer 1829 context, and it likely motivated Harris to complete the 25 August 1829 agreement with Grandin soon after. (See Doctrine and Covenants 44, 1835 ed.; Knight, Reminiscences, 6–7.) For a much deeper study of the change in the dating of this revelation, see Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C.

Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013).

4. *JSP*, D1:86n333; Joseph Knight Sr. Reminiscences.

5. Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants, 2013 ed. [v]. The primary historical narrative established in this section draws extensively from the work of *JSP*; *Dr*; Joseph Knight Sr. Reminiscences.

6. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, book 6, [4–7]. Joel Tiffany, “Mormonism no. 2,” *Tiffany's Monthly*, August 1859, 168–70.

7. *Wayne Sentinel*, 26 June 1829.

8. This information and sequence of events is outlined in MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 181–195. John H. Gilbert, Memorandum, 8 September 1892, photocopy, Church History Library. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-circa-summer-1829-dc-19/1#historical-intro>. In addition, “Thurlow Weed, a printer in Rochester, stated that JS and Harris ‘applied to the Senior Editor of the *Journal*, then residing at Rochester, to Print his ‘Book of Mormon.’ Weed further explained that Harris had ‘offered to pay for the Printing.’ After Harris reportedly received an offer from Rochester printer Elihu F. Marshall, he returned to Palmyra to renegotiate with Grandin, ‘assuring Grandin that the book would be printed in Rochester if he declined the job again.’” “Recent Progress of the Mormons,” *Albany Evening Journal*, 31 July 1854, [2], emphasis in original; see also “Prospect of Peace with Utah,” *Albany Evening Journal*, 19 May 1858, [2]; and “From the Troy Times,” *Albany Evening Journal*, 21 May 1858, [2]. *JSP*, D1:86n334.

9. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 182.

10. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 182; “Mormon Leaders at Their Mecca,” *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, 12.

11. Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, “Reconfiguring the Archive: Women and the Social Production of the Book of Mormon, in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020), 105–35.

12. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-circa-summer-1829-dc-19/1#historical-intro>. The issues surrounding Harris's property are described in *JSP*, D1:88n336, “Harris had previously deeded eighty acres of his property to his wife, Lucy, in 1825 (though the deed was not recorded until May 1828), leaving at least 151 acres under Harris's control. That transfer to Lucy Harris was apparently part of a jointure agreement whereby she received her marital interest (often referred to as a dower interest) from Martin. Historian Andrew Jenson later noted that Lucy Harris “partially separated from him, which he patiently endured for the gospel's sake.” See Wayne Co., NY, Deed Records, 1823–1904, vol. 5, pp. 530–532, 29 Nov. 1825, microfilm 478,782; Wayne Co., NY, Deed Records, 1823–1904, vol. 10, pp. 515–516, 7 Apr. 1831, microfilm 478,786, U.S. and Canada Record Collection, FHL; Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901–36), 1:275.

13. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 183.

14. The following statement from the *JSP* validates the supposition that Grandin's fees were already paid before publication. “Since Grandin's investment was secured, he had no financial interest in whether the Book of Mormon sold well or not. This helps explain

why there is no evidence Grandin was alarmed by the activities of Abner Cole who, using Grandin's printshop and press, began illicitly printing pages of the Book of Mormon in January 1830 in the Palmyra *Reflector*. Even after the Book of Mormon was available for purchase beginning in late March 1830, Grandin continued to allow Cole to use his press to deride the Book of Mormon." <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-circa-summer-1829-dc-19/1#historical-intro>; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk. 9, [9]–[10]; "The First Book of Nephi," *Reflector* [Palmyra, NY], 2 January 1830, 9; News Item, *Wayne Sentinel* [Palmyra, NY], 19 March 1830, [3].

15. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 193.

16. Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants.

17. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 181–195.

18. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism: Biography of Its Founders and History of Its Church* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 51.

19. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/martin-harris>.

20. Ronald W. Walker, "Martin Harris: Mormonism's Early Convert," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 29–43. Edward Stevenson, "Martin Harris Testimony 4 September 1870," in *Early Mormon Documents, Volume 2*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 332.

21. Gregg Thomas, *The Prophet of Palmyra: Mormonism Reviewed and Examined . . .* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), 37; Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 40, 42; James H. Reeves, "James H. Reeves Account, 1872," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents, Volume 2*, 340–42, as cited in Walker, "Martin Harris Mormonism's Early Convert," 33.

22. H. B. Emerson, "Martin Harris To H. B. Emerson, 23 November 1870," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents, Volume 2*, 336, as cited in Walker, "Martin Harris Mormonism's Early Convert," 33.

23. Joel Tiffany, "Martin Harris Interview With Joel Tiffany, 1859," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents, Volume 2*, 300, as cited in Walker, "Martin Harris Mormonism's Early Convert," 33.

24. Emerson, "Martin Harris To H. B. Emerson, 23 January 1871," 338–39, as cited in Walker, "Martin Harris Mormonism's Early Convert," 33.

25. Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants.

26. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 51.

27. Casey Paul Griffiths, "Universalism and the Revelations of Joseph Smith," in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 168–87; John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: W. J. & J. K. Simon; New York, Robert Carter, 1842); Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: Printed and published by the author, 1834), 261.

28. Bruce C. Hafen, "The Atonement: All for All," *Ensign*, May 2004, 98.

29. Terryl Givens, in Grace Carter, "Maxwell Institute Series Helps Readers See the Book of Mormon through New Eyes," *Church News*, 7 May 2020.

30. "Beyond Justice: Reading Alma 42 in the Context of Atonement Theories," in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and

Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 21–59.

31. Stevenson, “Martin Harris Testimony 4 September 1870,” 332.

32. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 261.

33. “Circa Summer 1832 History,” *Joseph Smith’s Accounts of the First Vision* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), <https://www.churchofjesus-christ.org/manual/first-vision-accounts/1832-account?lang=eng>.

34. Griffiths, “Universalism and the Revelations of Joseph Smith,” 168–87.

35. At the time of Martin Harris, the Quakers not only rejected the view of the Trinity (a view Martin shared), but they also saw Jesus as a fully human being who was not of divine birth and origin, but instead “anointed by the Spirit as the Christ’s vessel.” Such a bounded Christology of Jesus had an effect on the way that Quakers viewed the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. Instead of understanding Christ’s suffering and death as a form of substitution for humanity, or as a reconciliation between God and the world for a divine law of justice, or the price of sin; for Quakers, “the atonement rather helped reconcile the world to God.” E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 330.

36. While we have seen that Doctrine and Covenants 19 pushes back against some of the lower Christological assumptions of the Quakers, it seems to agree with them in their oppositions of trinitarianism. See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 19:2, 19.

37. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 76.

38. William C. Placher, ed., *Essentials in Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 189.

39. See, for instance, Doctrine and Covenants 19:15, 17, 20.

40. Even with the strong language in Doctrine and Covenants 19:15, it is not the wrath of the Father being inflicted. It is also important to note that section 19 does not describe a situation in which an individual suffers for her sins to her own salvation. Unfortunately, sometimes the phrase in verse 17 of “suffer even as I” is misread to mean that a person could suffer for his own sins, and then be saved because of it. Section 19 makes no such promise of personal salvific power. In fact, in a later revelation, individuals who are unrepentant are said to “suffer the wrath of Almighty God, until the fulness of times, when Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet, and shall have perfected his work” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:106). Thus, even those who choose not to repent and to suffer are not ultimately saved by their own suffering but are finally saved by the power of Christ.

41. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (Chesapeake, VA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1828), s.v. “Tremble.”

42. Interestingly, restorationists (led by Alexander Campbell) also focused on this theme: “It is rather, then, with a reference to his *death* than to his *life*, that he is called the *Lamb* of God. Neither his *example* nor his *doctrine* could expiate sin. This required the shedding of blood: for without shedding of blood, there never was remission of sin.” Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (Cincinnati, OH: Bosworth, Chase & Hall, 1871), 35.

43. Givens, in Carter, *Church News*, 7 May 2020.

44. Indenture, Martin Harris to Egbert B. Grandin, Wayne Co., NY, 25 August 1829, Wayne Co., NY, Mortgage Records, vol. 3, pp. 325–26, microfilm 479,556, U.S. and Canada Record Collection, Family History Library.

45. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Witness: Martin Harris,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 37.

46. Joseph L. Townsend, “Reverently and Meekly Now,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 185.